

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5135

As Passed Senate, March 16, 2005

Title: An act relating to volunteer fire fighters' and reserve officers' relief and pensions.

Brief Description: Addressing volunteer fire fighters' and reserve officers' relief and pensions.

Sponsors: Senators Kastama, Mulliken, Zarelli, Doumit and Rasmussen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Ways & Means: 2/22/05, 2/24/05 [DP].

Passed Senate: 3/16/05, 47-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Prentice, Chair; Doumit, Vice Chair; Fraser, Vice Chair; Brandland, Fairley, Kohl-Welles, Parlette, Pridemore, Rasmussen, Regala, Rockefeller, Schoesler and Thibaudeau.

Staff: Erik Sund (786-7454)

Background: The Volunteer Fire Fighters' and Reserve Officers' Relief and Pension System (VFFRORPS) provides relief and pension benefits for members of regularly organized volunteer fire departments and law enforcement agencies. Members who serve and make monthly retirement contributions for a period of at least 25 years are eligible to receive a pension benefit at age 65. Relief benefits include payment of medical expenses and disability pensions for members injured in the line of duty and payment of burial expenses and survivor benefits for members killed in the line of duty.

VFFRORPS benefits are administered by the Washington State Board for Volunteer Fire Fighters and Reserve Officers (BVFFRO) and paid out of the Volunteer Fire Fighters' Relief and Pension Fund (VFFRPF). Revenues to the VFFRPF come from: a 40 percent share of the premium tax paid on fire insurance policies issued within the state; contributions from volunteer fire fighters, emergency workers, and reserve officers; contributions from participating municipal corporations and emergency service districts; and returns on the investment of moneys in the VFFRPF.

Summary of Bill: The definitions of "fire fighter" and "emergency worker" are clarified in order to prevent part-time fire fighters and emergency workers from earning a benefit from both the Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS) and the VFFRORPS for the same service. The BVFFRO is authorized to seek recovery of its benefit costs if a volunteer is injured and sues a third party for damages. The annual fee paid by participating municipal corporations to fund relief benefits for volunteer fire fighters is increased from \$10 per member to \$30 per member.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The Board for Volunteer Fire Fighters and Reserve Officers, along with the volunteers and the agencies that employ them, support these efficiencies as means to keep the Volunteer Fire Fighters Relief and Pension Fund solvent.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: PRO: Brigitte K. Smith, Board for Volunteer Fire Fighters and Reserve Officers; Ryan Spiller, Washington Fire Commissioners Association.